

## Creating a comic

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This year, the S Hospital is celebrating its 100th anniversary. It is also the hospital where I was born. The situation of children who are in hospital for long periods of time is close to my heart and this is why I decided to find a way to entertain them. Since I have a talent and a particular interest in the field of drawing and the arts, I decided to create an artistic work. From the start, I knew that this piece of work would include a humorous element because, for me, laughter is essential, and in the case of sick children, it can help them through difficult times.

My personal project focuses on two areas of interaction: *homo faber* and *community and service*. Within the context of *homo faber*, I explored different aspects of my creativity to find a form of dialogue, style of artistic expression and form of presentation which could capture the interest of young people, entertain them and help them pass the time. With respect to the area *community and service*, even though the S Hospital is not in my immediate community, it is the main treatment centre for childhood diseases in my region. Even though I had to receive treatment on a number of occasions in this hospital during my childhood, I am lucky enough to have excellent health. It therefore seems important to me to do my part by making a gift to this hospital centre and by offering a little entertainment to a great many children who are not as fortunate as myself and are seriously ill.

I investigated various forms of artistic expression, such as illustrating novels, caricatures and comics, and concluded that the latter was best suited to my intended goal. Having made this decision, I constructed my story around the theme of villains and legends of literature and folklore. I then established two criteria before developing my creative work further: the story had to be funny and had to appeal to young persons aged 9 to 16. I discussed the concept behind my comic with several people to get their reactions and suggestions. I also explored the different forms of comics and their techniques before making my choice. During the creative stage of my piece of work, I also

contacted the managers at the S Hospital to offer them copies of my comic.

On the following pages, I am going to give a clear explanation of the research I carried out to get my comic underway, the methods I used and the various stages of completion. I will then present to you my sources of inspiration, the decisions I had to make during the course of this assignment and the extent to which the final product matches what I set out to achieve at the start.

## **Description of the work and process**

Within the context of the area of interaction *homo faber*, I focused on the various creative processes I could use and took into account the impact I wanted my comic to make on the young patients it was intended for. My research was divided into two parts: the first related to the technical aspects of comics and the second helped me to define more clearly the characters and the period in which my story would take place.

First of all, I consulted several books and websites dealing with techniques for designing and producing comics. This allowed me to identify the key stages involved in creating a comic: synopsis, script, graphics research, page layout, pencil sketch, inking, colouring and lettering<sup>1</sup>. I then researched the visual layout of comics, that is, the graphics style, the type and positioning of panels and the different types of composition I could use. I then focused my research on the period in which I wanted my story to take place. This allowed me to identify the style of clothes, dwellings and modes of transport which I would use in my comic. I also did some research on the traditional villains of literature and folklore. I identified a large number and looked for reference sources for their origins or their creators. I then researched their physical appearance and the various ways in which they were portrayed in the past.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of this research, I was able to make my final choices as regards my characters and the period for my comic. I decided that my main character would be completely fictitious and that he would meet the following secondary characters: Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the Headless Horseman from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Igor, the Phantom of the Opera and Medusa. As most of these characters were created in the 19th

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia: [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bande\\_dessinee](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bande_dessinee)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix III

century, I decided to set my story around the mid-1800s. Since I already had the broad outline of the story in my head, I began to write the dialogue needed to complete around a hundred panels, roughly half of my comic.

I knew I had to buy materials for my comic and that it would be quite expensive to have it printed. I therefore contacted an organization which helps young people complete their projects: the Fondation Jeunes-PROJET. I submitted a description of my personal project to them, along with an estimate of the material and print costs. I received a prompt positive reply, saying that the Fondation was giving me \$200.

After receiving this financial support, I focused my attention on the art materials I would use to create my comic. After several experiments, I chose the following materials: 8½ x 11 white pages, black permanent felt pens with various tip sizes, brush-tip colour felt pens, colour pencils and fine-tip colour felt pens.

I then concentrated on the visual appearance of my comic, that is to say the graphics style and the layout. Comics come in various styles: manga, realistic, humorous and avant-gardist. I decided, however, to use a humorous style which was very well suited for my story and was in line with my vision of the work and its objective: to entertain and amuse young people aged 9 to 16. By using a style which was closer to caricature, I was able to exaggerate the expressions and reactions of my characters to add humour to my story. Also, “the way anatomy is constructed can be as characteristic of an artist as his style. The key is to find a way of working you are comfortable with (...)”<sup>3</sup>. I therefore created my characters using a style which suited me perfectly and which, in my opinion, would appeal to the age group of the readers to whom I intended to dedicate my comic.

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<sup>3</sup> CALAFIORE, J. 2006. *Apprendre à dessiner les super-héros*. Luçon. Éditions Delcourt. p. 16.

In order to make the story easy for young people to follow, I chose quite a classic layout, while still expressing my creativity in a number of ways: by using zoom techniques, varying the size of specific panels and by playing with the composition. When creating the layout for my comic, I adhered to the following guiding principle: “The chronology of a story is dictated by the order of the panels (...) if your narration becomes confusing, you risk losing your audience. Experimentation is not a bad thing in itself, but never lose sight of your primary objective: to tell a story.”<sup>4</sup>

Once I had made all these choices, I embarked on the artistic production of my comic. For each page, I proceeded as follows: I started by drawing the different panels; I created the illustrations and balloons for each panel in pencil, bearing in mind the dialogue I had written; I traced over everything in black permanent felt pen and added colour using felt pens. I was happy with the results I obtained for the first few complete pages and I wrote the remaining dialogue needed to finish my story. I then illustrated these pages in the same way as the first ones. Once I had finished, my comic contained 28 pages.

Next, I created a cover page which gave quite a good representation of the plot of my story. Having traced over it in black felt pen, I tried to colour in this cover page using colour felt pens but given the large areas to cover, the result was not satisfactory. I therefore tried to find another solution and did some experiments using Photodraw and a digital copy of my original. After adding colour to the page on the computer, I had it printed and I finally achieved the result I was looking for.

The very last step in the creation process was to write a page explaining to the reader the true identity of the characters and the legends which were the

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<sup>4</sup> CHINN, M. 2005. *Concevoir et réaliser une B.D. du script à l'album*. Paris. Groupe Eyrolles. p. 22.

source of my inspiration. I also inserted a short personal note about the author. This completed the creation stage of my project.

I contacted a print broker I already knew to get a cost estimate for printing my comic. The final product I wished to achieve was as follows: spiral-bound two-sided colour pages. As this comic is intended for sick children, I specified that each of the pages should be laminated so that the copies could be wiped and disinfected by hospital staff. Laminating the pages would also extend the life of the copies. I received a print cost of \$20 per copy.

During the production stage of my comic and within the context of the area of interaction *community and service*, I also approached the managers of the S Hospital. I was referred to the hospital's committee of volunteers which is responsible for receiving donations of recreational materials for children. I explained to them what my personal project consisted of and why I wanted to give it to the young patients. They said it suited their requirements perfectly. I immediately felt that my gesture was greatly appreciated and this confirmed to me that, in this way, I was making a contribution to my community. We agreed that I would produce around three copies for the hospital and that I would deliver them personally.

So, with my offer accepted, I gave the printer the go-ahead to produce the copies of my comic. The lead time was around one week. I couldn't wait to see the result and I was really pleased when I was finally able to hold the fruits of my labour in my hands. The final product certainly lived up to my expectations.

All that was left to do was to go and deliver the three copies of my comic to the S Hospital. So I rang the hospital and made an appointment with Mrs L., the senior assistant on the committee of volunteers. I went to meet her on 26 February. Mrs L. was very pleased to receive my comic and she



took me to visit the hospital's Joujouthèque\* as this is where my comic would be kept. The sick children's parents come to the Joujouthèque to take out toys, books and videos to entertain their children while they are in hospital. It was with a great deal of joy, satisfaction and pride that I presented my three copies to Mrs L.<sup>5</sup> I left the hospital feeling that I had made a positive contribution.

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\* *Translator's note: a film, toy and book lending service at this hospital*

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix V

## **Analysis**

At the root of my personal project was above all the desire to help children who are sick. I find the suffering, courage and perseverance of young people in hospital deeply moving. One of my cousins, to whom I'm close, suffered from leukaemia for a number of years. Through him, I have seen that long periods of hospitalization bring a lot of sadness, frustration and loneliness. I thought to myself that it would be good to be able to give these children a few moments of pleasure so that they forget the ordeals they are going through. "To be able to laugh or smile during difficult moments allows children to be more relaxed or more alert and, in any event, forces them to re-evaluate their situation and to view their stay in hospital in a different way. This time of play will have lessened the anxiety and worries they have about their illness or accident."<sup>6</sup> The most obvious method I could think of was to put my talent for drawing to use. I already knew that I wanted to give my creative work to the young patients of S Hospital and all that was left for me to do was to choose the form and the theme it would take.

It was during an English lesson, while we were discussing Gothic culture, that I had the idea to create a comic starring Frankenstein and crew. I have always had a certain fascination for the "villains" in stories and comics, and this is often the type of characters I prefer to draw. However, I knew that, as I wanted to appeal to young people, and as I wanted to provide them with some fun entertainment, I would have to give my story a humorous touch. This would also allow me to take a few liberties with the characters and their period.

The research I conducted on comics in general helped me gain a better understanding of the various techniques you can use to make a story more

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<sup>6</sup> *Les clowns à l'hôpital [Hospital clowns]*: <http://www.clowns-hopitals.be/objectifs.html>

appealing and interesting. Even though I have been drawing for a long time now, I had never used a systematic approach to create a comic. As a matter of fact, when it comes to my drawings, I am more inclined to improvise than to think about and plan them. I soon came to realize that my usual approach would not work for such an important project. By following the different steps suggested by the authors of books and websites I consulted, I was able to work more efficiently and avoid wasting time through using the wrong technique. The method involving pencil sketching, inking and colouring, for example, turned out to be very productive and allowed me to produce a quality piece of work.

The research I conducted on the subject of villains in literature helped me to choose my characters and to identify the period which would be most appropriate for my story. In making this choice, I also considered how easy it would be to create and draw the characters and how much pleasure this would give me. I was also able to find out more about each of them and to incorporate different physical characteristics into my story to enable readers to identify them. For example, the Phantom of the Opera wears a mask, Medusa has hair in the form of snakes and Mr Jekyll changes his physical appearance and behaviour according to the identity he takes on. I designed my characters' clothes using, as inspiration, photos from the periods I looked at during my research.<sup>7</sup> It was in this phase of my creative work that the area of interaction *homo faber* was most apparent.

I deliberately kept the plot quite simple. Even if I wanted the young people to learn more about certain villains in literature, I was just happy to arouse their curiosity about the comic itself and I preferred to provide more details on a separate page at the end of my story. As my target age group was 9 to 16, I had to be sure that the dialogue was quite simple but not too childish. The

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix II

text in the balloons is sometimes quite short and some panels do not contain any dialogue, with the characters' expressions and the composition serving to convey the message. "Within a panel, composition is a way of catching the reader's eye."<sup>8</sup> For example, pages 3, 6 and 16 all include a panel containing a close-up which highlights the character's expression.



Page 3



Page 6



Page 16

The close-up "shows only the face, bringing you closer to the thoughts, feelings and particularly the expressions [of the] character".<sup>9</sup>

The panel on the right, which appears on page 11 of my comic, is a good illustration of how I used composition to bring an element to the fore that gave a clue as to the true identity of a character: the Phantom of the Opera. These are areas where I was really able to express my creativity and that gave me a great deal of satisfaction.



<sup>8</sup> CHINN, M. 2005. *Concevoir et réaliser une B.D. du script à l'album*. Paris. Groupe Eyrolles. p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> DUMORTIER, R. 2000. *L'atelier de la bande dessinée*. Italy. Éditions Moulinsart. p. 29.

As far as the techniques I used are concerned, in general they are quite traditional. Pencil sketching and then inking using a black felt pen are the most commonly used methods to create a comic. It is a very quick technique and one I felt comfortable using. The only real problem I had to deal with was applying colour. I initially thought about colouring my pages using Photodraw, but after several attempts, and even though the results were very satisfactory, I realized that this would be far too time-consuming. To colour one page, it would take me around two to three hours. So I looked at another option: using felt pens. I did not think I would be able to achieve the result I was looking for using traditional felt pens, but by trying out brush-tip models I found something that suited me. These simple tools and techniques really allowed me to be creative without slowing down my rate of work.

The last decision I had to make concerning the final appearance of my comic was the type of printing I would use. I had planned to have my comic colour photocopied onto white paper before having it laminated. However, after several attempts at the printer's, we concluded that the paper, even once it had been laminated, was not stiff enough and you could see the colours through it. Therefore, despite the slightly higher costs involved, I chose a white card which made it possible to achieve a better print quality and which would make my comic last longer.

At the outset, I was not aware of all the work I had to do and the time I would need to spend on the pencil sketch, the inking and the colouring. When I realized how much time it was taking to produce each page<sup>10</sup>, I had to speed up my work rate. To do so, I had to cut down on the amount of detail in each of my panels. The first few pages of my comic are therefore more detailed and these are the ones I prefer. I would have liked to have had more time to be able to do the same with all my pages. I realize I should have calculated

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix IV

the approximate amount of time needed to produce each page right at the very start of my work. I could then have planned my time better if I had known in advance how many pages I had to produce per week in order to finish on time and achieve the final product I wanted.

One of the aspects of the stages of production of my comic which I perhaps did not clearly understand was the insertion of text in the balloons. I wrote the text as I was illustrating the panels, and when the time came to have them photocopied for the colouring, I should have rubbed out all the dialogue before rewriting it in ink. As I was short on time, I had no choice but to trace over it in ink. I am not really happy with the writing and the alignment of the text in the balloons, and this is a point I would have really liked to have done better.

I think that overall I used an approach which was well suited to the aim of my project. I was able to produce my piece of work in a methodical way, but, as I have already mentioned, it would have been wiser to assess and manage my time more effectively. My schedule<sup>11</sup> should have been more comprehensive and should have specified a start and end date for each task. As I underestimated the time needed to complete my creative work, I had a lot to do during the final three weeks prior to handing in my report. Ideally, I should have finished my comic at least one month prior to the deadline for handing in the report, as this would have allowed me to focus on one thing, writing my report, instead of having to manage several tasks at once.

While completing my personal project, I sometimes found that I was daunted by the amount of work I had to do. Certain things, however, helped me to persevere and kept me motivated. The financial support from the Fondation Jeunes-PROJET gave me encouragement and enabled me to buy materials

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix I

which I enjoyed working with, and this gave me the incentive to keep going. Also, the positive feedback from my friends and family when I showed them the first few pages also gave me a lot of motivation. I realized that it was important for me to have support when working on a long-term project.

This personal project represents the most complex piece of artistic work I have undertaken until now. Now it is finished, I really feel I used a very thorough artistic approach. Throughout this process, I kept in mind the two areas of interaction which served as the focus for my project. *Homo faber* was represented by reflection, research and consultations with people, the evaluation of various techniques and the creative choices I made with regard to designing my comic. I have realized that *homo faber* is probably the area of interaction which most interests me.

As far as the area of interaction *community and service* is concerned, I used the following two key questions as the starting point for my reflection and creative work: how can I contribute to the community and how can I help others?<sup>12</sup> Now that my project is finished, I can say that I definitely found the best way for me to give something back to my community by using my artistic talent. I particularly wanted to entertain young sick children and, at the same time, create a piece of artistic work which would be representative of me and which I could be proud of. It seems to me that my drawing skills are more valuable since I realized I could use them to help others and that the products of my imagination could help to entertain children going through difficult times. It was at the official presentation of my comic to S Hospital's Joujouthèque that I became truly aware of what I had actually achieved. Mrs L., who took receipt of my gift on behalf of the young patients, really made me feel that my gesture was important to them.

Due to my personal interests and by exploring the computer tools available for creating artistic projects, I realized that there were other options open to me apart from comics. I could have produced a more interactive project, for example, by creating a short film or multimedia piece combining illustration, music and 3D animation. This, however, would have required additional work

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<sup>12</sup> IBO: <http://www.ibo.org/fr/myp/curriculum/interaction/community/>



on my part to learn how to use all these tools. This is a challenge I intend to tackle in years to come. In this way, I will be able to develop new skills which I will use to help others.

In conclusion, I think that, considering the objectives I set myself, the resources and the time I had to devote to my personal project, and the support given to me by my friends, family and project supervisor, I succeeded in producing a quality piece of work that I am proud of, and which represents a major challenge which I successfully met.

## APPENDIX I

### Schedule

4 October	Read personal project guide
11 October	Start research on comics
14 October	Start process journal
17 October	Draw up schedule
3 to 6 November	Compile documentary data
12 to 24 November	Write dialogue
25 December to 6 January	Creation of comic and inking
7 January to 28 January	Colouring of comic
3 January	Purchase necessary materials for colouring
8 February	Contact print broker
9 February	Send originals to printer
22 February	Take delivery of copies of comic
26 February	Present copies to S          Hospital
2 March	Hand in final report

## APPENDIX II

### The clothes

*Around 1850, fashion, which was highly influenced by the bourgeois spirit, sought to combine comfort, a richness of materials and a concern for respectability.<sup>13</sup>*



<sup>13</sup> Text and photos taken from the website of the Montreal School Board: <http://www.csm.qc.ca>

## APPENDIX III

### Portraits of villains<sup>14</sup>



Vampire



Gorgon



Igor



Headless Horseman



Frankenstein



Phantom of the Opera

<sup>14</sup> Photos taken from Wikipedia: <http://fr.wikipedia.org>

## APPENDIX IV

### Steps in the production of a page



#### **Step 1 – approximately 10 min**

*Layout: mark out the position of the panels on the page in pencil.*

#### **Step 2 – approximately 45 min**

*Pencil sketch: draw the contents of each panel in pencil.*

#### **Step 3 – approximately 30 min**

*Inking: trace over the outlines of the panels and illustrations. Rub out any pencil marks.*



#### **Step 4 – approximately 20 min**

*Colouring: Colour the contents of the panels using colour felt pens.  
Ink over the text in the balloons.*



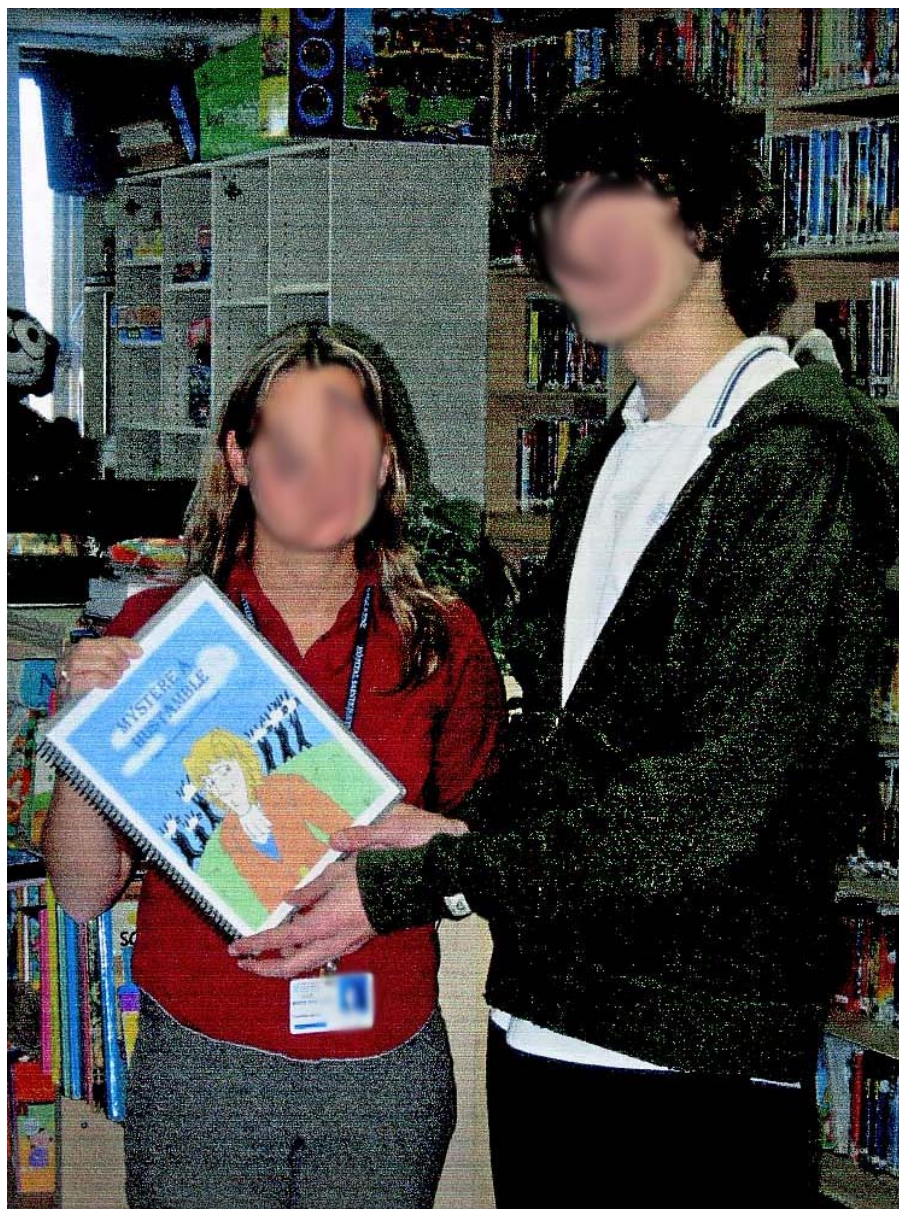
#### **Step 5 – approximately 45 min per copy**

*Printing: colour printing, lamination and binding by the printer.*



## APPENDIX V

### Photo of the official presentation at S Hospital



*J.D. with Mrs L., senior assistant to the committee of volunteers of the S Hospital, at the official presentation of this comic in the hospital's Joujouthèque.*

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*Les clowns à l'hôpital (Hospital clowns):* <http://www.clowns-hopital.be/objectifs.html>

<http://www.mesimaginaires.com>